DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 160 719 UD 018 676

AUTHOR Eisinger, Peter K.
TITLE The Community Action Program and the Development of Black Political Leadership. Discussion Paper No. 493-78.
INSTITUTION Wisconsin Univ., Madison. Inst. for Research on Poverty.
PUB DATE May 78
NOTE 39p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Action Programs (Community); *Administrator Education; Aspiration; *Black Leadership; City Government; *Community Action; *Community Development; Governance; *Political Power; *Poverty Programs; State Government

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ED160719

OCT 16 1978

#493-78

INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON POVERTY DISCUSSION PAPERS

THE COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Peter K. Eisinger

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Peter K. Eisinger

May 1978

I wish to thank several graduate assistants for their faithful help on this project, including Tim Kaufman-Osborn, Dave McConnell, and Darryl Solochek. Support for this research was provided by the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Responsibility for the finished product, however, is mine alone.

ABSTRACT

Early assessments of the impact of the Community Action Program of the federal War on Poverty suggested that its major achievement would be the creation of a corps of black political leaders. Data gathered from a nationwide sample (N = 210) of black elected officials in state and local government show that nearly a quarter of those elected since the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 had substantial pre-election CAP experience. In contrast to other black politicians the former CAP officials appeared more politically ambitious, were more likely to hold state rather than local office, and tended to come from urban rather than small city or rural jurisdictions. In addition there is evidence to indicate that the CAPs provided significant training in leadership skills and played some political support functions.

The Community Action Program and the Development of
Black Political Leadership

The prime years of the Community Action Program (CAP) of the federal War on Poverty lasted less than half a decade. But even as the program began to undergo the first of a series of eviscerating transformations in the late 1960s, one of its sharpest critics was nevertheless willing to suggest that community action would leave an important and enduring imprint on the structure of black politics. In his celebrated polemic, Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding, Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote, "Very possibly the most important long run impact of the community action program of the 1960s will prove to have been the formation of an urban Negro leadership echelon at just the time when the Negro masses . . . were verging towards extensive commitments to urban politics" (1969, p. 129). Now, nearly a decade after Moynihan's prediction, it is appropriate to begin to explore the degree to which this has in fact been the case.

In the period since the publication of Moynihan's book, a number of observers have offered general support for its prediction. In a 1969 study done under contract to the Office of Economic Opportunity, for example, the firm of Barss, Reitzel and Associates concluded that "current information indicates that this [ghetto leadership] vacuum has been at least partially filled by leaders with a high degree of contact with CAP--if not indeed created by it" (Brecher, 1973, p. 102; see also Kramer, 1969, p. 249). In Regulating the Poor, Piven and Cloward argue that the Great Society programs worked with "startling success" to integrate blacks into the existing political system: "In many cities

the Great Society agencies became the base for new black political organizations. . . In some areas with large numbers of black voters, the leaders of these new organizations began to seek elective office . . ." (1971, pp. 274-275). In a major retrospective piece on the impact of community action, David Greenstone and Paul Peterson echo the foregoing conclusion, arguing that, most fundamentally, CAP "contributed to black incorporation in the body politic," helping, among other things, to underwrite organizationally the election of blacks to political office (1977, pp. 272, 276; see also Strange, 1972, p. 467).

The evidence on which these conclusions have been based, however, is largely a product of case study material. The data are sparse, geographically limited, and by now out of date. A systematic examination of the importance of community action in the dramatic emergence of a corps of black political leaders is lacking not only in the literature evaluating the War on Poverty but also in recent studies of black elected officialdom in particular (e.g., Cole, 1976; Conyers and Wallace, 1976). Thus the purpose of the present study is to offer a preliminary analysis of more systematically generated data regarding the role of community action in the background of a nationwide sample of black elected officials in state and local government.

1. THE COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM

The Community Action Program was established by Congress in Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. As Sar Levitan has observed, CAP was a "catch-all" for projects to combat poverty: All sorts of

programs, ranging from day care to community organizing to consumer education to birth control clinics, could be funded through it (1969, p. 109). In addition to supporting and shaping the delivery of certain types of services in target poverty areas, many CAPs engaged in political activities. The most common of these involved efforts to pressure local government bureaucracies to take greater account of the needs and desires of minorities and the poor. At the peak of the program in the late 1960s, there were more than 1,000 community action agencies in the United States. Seventy-five percent of these were located in predominantly rural areas, but two-thirds of the funding actually went to urban CAPs. In the public mind the program quickly became associated with the problems of big city blacks (Christenson, 1975).

Although the Congressional injunction to include poor people themselves in the operations of community action agencies was contained only in the ambiguous clause calling for "maximum feasible participation of the residents of the areas and members of the groups served," the phrase nevertheless provided the main opportunity for the training of what were at the time called "indigenous" leaders. "Maximum feasible participation" was initially interpreted as requiring, **insofar as possible, the inclusion** of representatives of the poor (who were frequently either poor themselves or simply black) in both policy-making and administrative positions. In 1966 Congress established explicit guidelines to guarantee that representatives of the poor would constitute at least one-third of the elected community action agency boards of directors, who were responsible for making basic policy and funding decisions. The CAP agencies, through

which specific programs were funded, also offered job opportunities at the administrative and managerial levels for blacks and other minorities.[1] Thus, community action agencies provided highly visible settings in which people traditionally excluded from responsible public positions could gain political or administrative experience as well as public reputations.

But the heyday of the program was brief. In 1967 community action agencies were stripped of their independence from local government. All through the years of the Nixon administration the Office of Economic Opportunity, CAP's occasionally reluctant protector, was under assault. During one fourteen month period OEO was without legal authority after Nixon vetoed the agency's authorization. In 1974 Congress abolished OEO and replaced it with the Community Services Administration. Remaining CAPs were placed under the CSA. Shorn of their advocacy role, they became little more than minor players in the local government service delivery system. For the cadres of poverty warriors schooled in the early years of community action, other avenues, including electoral politics, seemed to offer more significant routes to power and influence.

2. THE SAMPLE

Although elected politicians surely comprise only a portion of the black community's "leadership echelon," a focus on this group offers a reasonable starting point. Between 1964, the year in which the Economic Opportunity Act was passed, and 1977, the number of black elected officials in the nation at all levels rose from approximately 70 (Williams, 1977, p. 24) to 4,311 (Joint Center for Political Studies, 1978, p. 3). The development of such a substantial pool of public figures in so short a

period raises questions about the means by which such people were identified, trained, and supported politically. To the extent that community action played a role in fulfilling these leadership development functions, we may conclude that government policy and public resources were successfully employed to aid and encourage the political mobilization and representation of a disadvantaged group.

The data on which this paper is based were gathered in the summer of 1977 by telephone interviews with a nationwide sample of black elected officials. The sample was drawn in equal parts from two comprehensive rosters of black elected officials put out by the Joint Center for Political Studies in 1970 and in 1976. This strategy was designed to maximize the possibility of analyzing the effects of community action experience on the emergence over time of the black leadership pool. Approximately equal numbers of mayors, aldermen or city councilmen, and state representatives were randomly selected. Letters were sent to respondents telling them that they had been selected for a study of the work histories of elected officials. Each letter was then followed up by a telephone interview.

Of the total of 285 names drawn, 210 were successfully interviewed, yielding a response rate of 74%.[2] These respondents represent 9% of the universe of black officials in the three offices in these two years (N = 2,254). For most purposes the samples have been combined in the analysis that follows.

There are several basic questions of importance for this study. First, did significant numbers of black elected officials have experience in the Community Action Program prior to their initial election? Second, do those who had CAP experiences differ in any important ways from other black politicians? Finally, did CAP experience actually seem to serve the leadership development functions of identification, training, and support?

3. DIMENSIONS OF CAP EXPERIENCE

Respondents were asked whether they had been involved as paid workers or administrators, board members, or volunteers in any of a wide variety of specific federal programs, in grass roots and political organizations, or in state and local government prior to their initial election to public office.[3] For each positive response details regarding the location, length of time, and specific nature of the individual's involvement were elicited. Participation in a federally funded Community Action Program emerged as a significant pre-election experience: 42 elected officials, representing 20% of the total sample, reported that they had been involved in one capacity or another in a community action agency. (An additional seven officials had experience in community action after their initial election to office, but these were not included in the CAP group in the analysis.) The length of involvement in CAP of the 42 respondents with pre-election experience ranged from one to twelve years, averaging 3.9 years.

Although these 42 politicians (called CAP'ers for short) provide the central focus of this examination, it is worth noting that an additional 28 elected officials had had experience in other programs associated with the War on Poverty or the Great Society. Twenty-four of these had been involved with the Headstart program, and the remaining four respondents (plus several of the Headstart activists) had participated as board members or administrators in the Model Cities program, or in various employment and manpower programs funded by the federal government. Although Headstart was originally a component of the Community Action Program, this analysis does not combine the 24 respondents with Headstart experience with the 42 community action participants. Headstart was one of many programs--

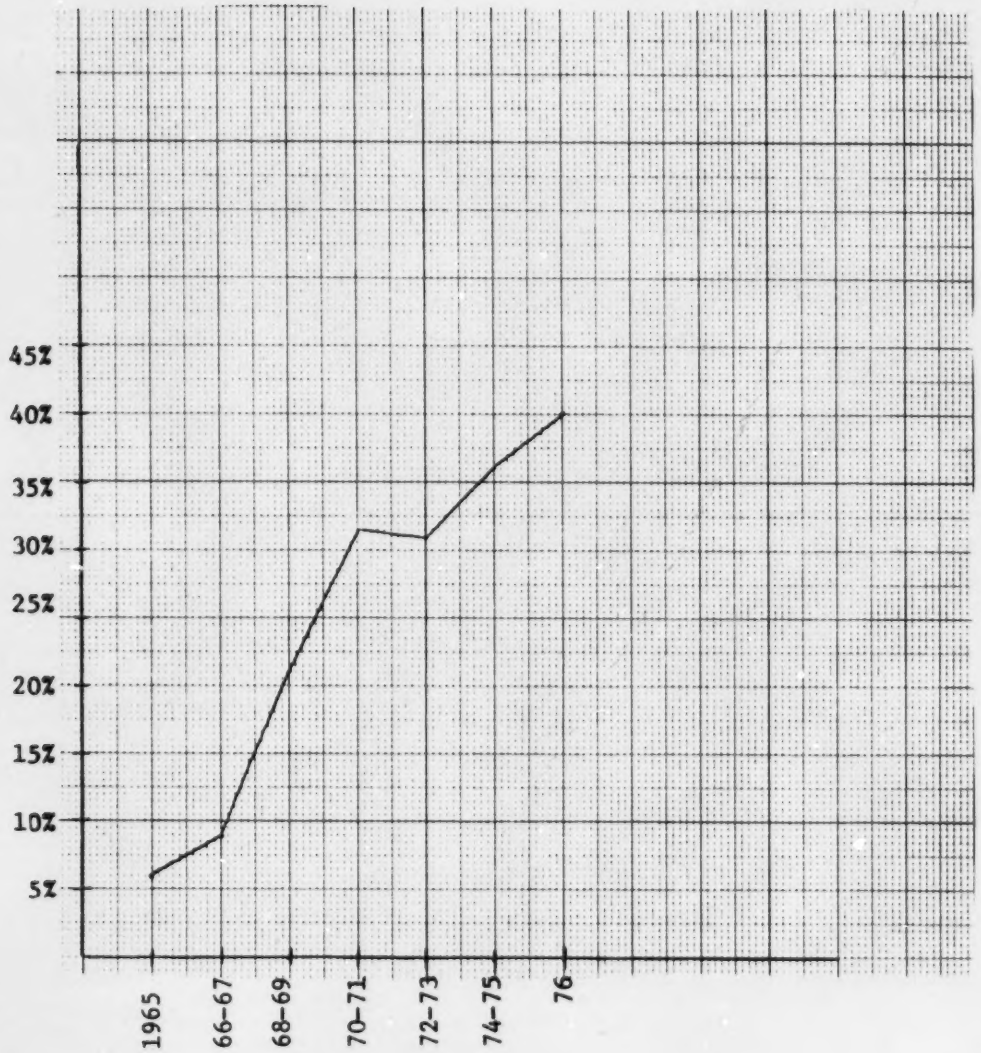
albeit generally the most visible--funded through the umbrella community action agencies. Yet it acquired a life and reputation apart from CAP. Its mission was specifically focussed on early childhood education rather than on the broader CAP tasks of community organization, service coordination, and political advocacy. Indeed, many local CAP officials saw Headstart as a threat to the CAP mission: It often diverted resources from other CAP projects; it was viewed as a prepackaged national program that undercut local initiative; and it often became an adjunct of local school systems, escaping the control and influence of the CAP agency altogether (Levitan, 1969, p. 138).

The incidence of prior community action experience among black elected officials has steadily increased over time (see Figure 1). The 42 officials with CAP experience represent 23% of the 180 politicians in the sample elected since 1964. The proportion of CAP'ers has increased in each succeeding "class"--i.e., those elected for the first time in any given year--suggesting that the influence of community action experience has been more than a short-run epiphenomenon of the mid-sixties.

4. THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE CAP GROUP

Tracing the independent effects of community action involvement on the political careers of the respondents is an extremely difficult task. The chief problem lies in the fact that most of the 210 respondents had a multiplicity of pre-election experiences that might have provided political visibility, training, and support. Involvement in the civil rights movement, for example, appears to have the kind of universality among black

Figure 1. Growth over time in proportion of black elected officials with CAP experience.



officials that service in the Résistance was once claimed to have among French public figures. Seventy-four percent of the entire sample said they had significant experience in civil rights organizations (mainly the NAACP). Twenty-four percent of the sample had been members of local government commissions or boards, and 12% had served their state government in some capacity. Others, as we have seen, had worked in a variety of federal programs administered at the local level as part of the War on Poverty. Since 165 respondents had experience in more than one of these settings (60 had experience in four or more; only 20 had experience in none of them), the chances that experiences would "contaminate" one another were high. Elaborate controls, even when possible, reduce the cells to miniscule proportions.

To deal with the problem of controls, I have chosen to compare three different groups: CAP'ers (N = 42), civil righters (N = 118), and those with neither CAP nor civil rights experience (N = 50). Among the CAP group 38 (90%) also had civil rights experience, making a pure comparison between civil rights and CAP backgrounds essentially impossible. Nevertheless, juxtaposing the 42 CAP'ers and the 118 civil righters provides a basis for determining whether the addition of CAP experience to that in the civil rights movement produces any difference.

The three different groups chosen for comparison may be seen to some very rough extent to have travelled different preparatory paths to political office. Community action, it may be argued, was likely to provide training in service administration as well as political advocacy. Civil rights organizations, however, were concerned overwhelmingly with political and legal advocacy alone. The third category, a residual, is composed of

people whose backgrounds ranged from no experience in any public sector organization or in movement politics to involvement in city government, neighborhood and community organizations, civic groups, and fraternal societies. The important political training experiences of the members of this group are extremely varied. As Table 7 indicates later in this paper, nearly equal proportions among the residuals cited occupation, local government, civic and fraternal groups, and neighborhood organizations as their most important preparatory involvements, a far more balanced distribution than that of the CAP group or the civil righters. But if their varied training for political office is a measure of the group's heterogeneity, there is nevertheless a predominant theme of service--doing and providing for some collectivity--that loosely ties together the institutional entities on the list. Neither political advocacy nor political mobilization is normally a concern of such organizations.

The three groups differ among themselves on several descriptive dimensions: They tend to occupy the three offices in different proportions; they are distributed differently on the urban-rural continuum; they vary slightly in age and education; and they exhibit moderately distinctive political career patterns. As Table 1 shows, a majority of those with CAP backgrounds are state legislators, whereas slightly less than one-third of the civil righters and only one-tenth of the residuals occupy such office. The disproportionate tendency of people with CAP backgrounds to be found in state office is an important finding and is taken up more fully later.

TABLE 1

Distribution by Office

	CAP	Civil Rights	Neither
Mayor	24% (10)	32% (38)	46% (23)
State Representative	52% (22)	32% (38)	8% (4)
Alderman	24% (10)	36% (42)	46% (23)
N =	42	118	50

NOTES: $X^2 = 21.69$.

Significant at the .001 level.

In comparison with the other two groups, CAP'ers tend to hold office in (or from, in the case of state legislators) urban settings (see Table 2). Of the 22 CAP'ers in state legislatures, for example, 18 represent districts in cities larger than 100,000. Indeed, 10 of those 18 come from cities over half a million. In contrast, however, the CAP mayors (6 out of 10) are concentrated in tiny villages under 2,500 in population. Although nearly half the entire sample is composed of small town and rural politicians (N = 93), only 29% of the CAP'ers occupy offices in or from places under 10,000 in population. It is important to recall here that, nationally, three-quarters of the CAPs were rural operations. These data indicate, however, that it was the urban component of the program that provided an avenue to elective office. Although the three groups are distributed regionally in relatively equal proportions—nearly half of each group comes from the South—even the southern CAP'ers tend to come from large urban places, whereas southern politicians in the other two categories tend to come from small towns and rural areas. Similar urban-rural differences obtain in the North.

The three groups differ slightly in terms of age, and the CAP'ers and civil righters can be distinguished from the residuals in educational achievement (see Table 3). These data suggest that the Community Action Program provided an avenue to public service for a particular generation of young and relatively well-educated activists. In addition, black politicians who came up through the Community Action Program also exhibit somewhat more ambitious career patterns than their counterparts in the other two groups. Consider, for example, the initial level at which members of these three groups entered electoral politics. Table 4 shows

TABLE 2

Distribution By Size of Place

	CAP	Civil Rights	Neither
>10,000	29% (12)	41% (48)	66% (33)
10-100,000	19% (8)	25% (29)	22% (11)
<100,000	52% (22)	35% (41)	12% (6)

NOTES: $X^2 = 20.068$.

Significant at the .001 level.

TABLE 3

Mean Age and Education

	CAP	Civil Rights	Neither
Mean Age	46	52	50
Mean Years of Education	15.5	15.2	13.2

TABLE 4

Initial Level of Entry to Elective Politics

	CAP	Civil Rights	Neither
Mayor	10% (4)	14% (16)	12% (6)
Alderman	36% (15)	48% (57)	70% (35)
State Representative	40% (17)	31% (37)	8% (4)
Other (county, school board)	14% (6)	7% (8)	10% (5)

NOTES: $X^2 = 49.78$.

Significant at the .001 level.

that although each of the three goups had similar low proportions of those who began their elective careers as mayors, the CAP group was substantially more likely than the other two to enter elective politics as state legislators. Civil righters and residuals tended to begin at the lowest level office, namely that of city councilman.

The three groups also exhibit different mobility patterns once they have achieved elective office. Mobility, as it is conceived here, is a function of the proportion of officials in a particular group who move out of their first office to another. For each of the three groups mobility (M) out of each office was measured in terms of the percentage change:

$$\frac{S}{F} - 1 = M,$$

where S = the number of officials in a given office at the time the sampling rosters were compiled, and

F = the number of officials who held that office at their initial entry into elective politics.

An M score of zero indicates no mobility, positive signs indicate an increase in the number of officials from a particular group in a given office, and negative signs indicate a decrease. Table 5 presents mobility scores for each of the three groups.

Slightly more than half the entire sample (N = 107) began their careers in electoral politics as alderman. All three groups show similar rates of mobility out of that office. The CAP and civil rights groups also exhibit nearly equal rates of increase in the proportion of mayors among them. The residual category, however, stands apart here, its original number of mayors nearly quadrupling (from 6 to 23).

TABLE 5

Mobility Scores

	CAP	Civil Rights	Neither
Alderman	-.67	-.74	-.66
Mayor	1.50	1.38	2.83
State Representative	.29	.03	0

The only other difference among the three groups appears at the level of state office. Neither the civil righters nor the residuals experienced any increase, as groups, in the number of state legislators. But the CAP group, whose original complement of state legislators was 17, showed an increase to 22, a gain of nearly 30%. Thus, not only do CAP'ers tend disproportionately to begin their elective careers as state legislators, but they also tend to move to that office from others in disproportionate numbers.

Once in office, CAP'ers also appear to display a surer sense of ambition and commitment to public life. Respondents still in office were asked what they planned to do after their current term expired. The results are shown in Table 6, Part A. Most CAP'ers plan to run again for some office. But civil righters and the residuals are less sure of their plans, and a significant number of the latter plan to retire. Among those who were already out of office when they were interviewed, we find (Table 6, Part B)--although the numbers are too small to be anything but suggestive--that most CAP'ers are still active in public life, whereas among the other two groups, most are either retired or scattered among occupations ("other") carrying little prestige, responsibility, or public visibility. These differences are, of course, partly a function of age differences among the groups, but they are also, I suspect, a product of a taste for public service generated by the comparatively structured links to government and the politics of federalism provided by the CAP experience.

TABLE 6

Ambition: What Current Officials Plan to do and What Retirees From Office Actually Do

	CAP	Civil Rights	Neither
Part A. Plans After Current Office			
Run for same office again	53% (18)	31% (28)	36% (15)
Run for another office	12% (4)	13% (12)	7% (3)
Retire from politics	9% (3)	6% (5)	26% (11)
DK.	26% (9)	50% (45)	31% (13)
	100% (34)	100% (90)	100% (42)
Part B. What Retirees Are Doing			
Retired from all work	25% (2)	36% (10)	75% (6)
Professionals (law, teaching, engineering)	25% (2)	10% (3)	--
Government, politics	50% (4)	18% (5)	12.5% (1)
Other	--	36% (10)	12.5% (1)
	100% (8)	100% (28)	100% (8)

NOTES: (Part A) $X^2 = 95.53$. Significant at the .001 level.

(Part B) $X^2 = 12.24$. Significant at the .10 level.

5. COMMUNITY ACTION AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

One of the first problems faced by those who aspire to elective office is how to establish a public identity. The tasks of gaining name recognition and of making a reputation as one who might appropriately fill a responsible public role are often accomplished by service in civic or auxiliary governmental or party organizations.[4] To the degree to which such institutions provide these opportunities for achieving visibility, we may say that they perform an identification function.

A second problem involves the acquisition of skills and training that might carry over into a career in electoral politics. Many politicians gain such experience in their prepolitical careers, particularly in the law, but others rely on civic, political, or governmental institutuions to prepare them. Much of this training is not, of course, pursued consciously with an eye toward a political career, but we may nevertheless speak of the training functions inherent in institutional roles and organizational affiliations.

Finally, individuals who aspire to political leadership require support for their efforts in the way of organizational resources and manpower. To the extent that institutions and organizations fulfill these requirements, we may speak of their support function.

To a significant degree the Community Action Program seems to have performed all three functions for those black officials who were involved in that program. Whether community action was a more effective setting for the performance of these leadership development tasks than were alternative institutions, however, is not entirely clear. But that is to some extent beside the point.

The overwhelming majority (N = 36; 86%) of those officials who served in the Community Action Program did so in the same town or city in which they subsequently ran successfully for office. Such agencies, then, did provide a potential base for establishing local visibility. Furthermore, most of those who had experience in community action agencies played roles there of a highly visible nature: 26 of them (62%) had served as elected board members for their agencies. Another 21% (N = 9) had served as administrators of programs funded by the community action agencies or in the agencies themselves. Both types of positions were often fraught with controversy, involving their incumbents in intense neighborhood struggles. In many places these figures gained substantial personal notoriety. The remaining CAP activists in our sample occupied less visible positions, mainly as middle level administrators and professionals, e.g., auditors, treasurers, or planning consultants.

Membership on the elected boards or in the local CAP administrative hierarchy, both at the director level as well as in the professional and middle level range, also provided a certain amount of training in the mechanics of seeking and holding public office. Board members, for example, had had to campaign in order to be elected.[5] Occasionally, their neighborhood jurisdictions were the size of substantial cities. Once on the board of a community action agency, members had to learn the fine and often disputed distinctions between their own policy-making role and the administrative tasks allotted to others. In addition, many became expert advocates and bargainers. Administrators learned the workings of local government and the by-ways of cooperative federalism. Budgetting,

grantsmanship, personnel practices, dealing with an occasionally militant clientele, and bargaining were other skills they had to master.

In order to discover the nature of the benefits that CAP'ers and others thought they had gained in their various pre-election activities that carried over to political office, respondents were asked which of their pre-election involvements were particularly important preparatory experiences and what they had learned in each of those. The results are shown in Tables 7 and 8.

The major finding in Table 7 is that no single organization or experience emerges as the clearly dominant preparatory ground for black political officials. Community and neighborhood organizations--mainly various sorts of block clubs and neighborhood improvement associations--are the involvements most frequently cited for the sample taken in its entirety; but these were mentioned in fact only 12% of the time. CAP ranks as the seventh most important experience among the 13 specific categories. However, among those with CAP backgrounds, the federal program clearly offered the most important political benefits. Compared to civil rights organizations and neighborhood groups, both of which were nearly universal involvements among our sample, CAP was clearly more influential within its orbit.

As for what exactly these officials believed they had gained from their pre-election experiences, CAP'ers were marginally more likely to stress political exposure and leadership training than any other benefit. "I became known in the community through my work on the _____ CAP board," was a typical comment. "I gained training as a representative," commented another official. "Political office was just the logical next step for me," said another.

TABLE 7

The Most Important Preparatory Experiences for Politics

	CAP	Civil Rights	Residuals	Totals
CAP	28% (13)	—	—	6% (13)
Civil Rights	9% (4)	9% (12)	—	8% (16)
Community and neighborhood groups	4% (2)	12% (16)	19% (7)	12% (25)
Party organizations	11% (5)	10% (13)	6% (2)	9% (20)
School, internships	9% (4)	3% (4)	—	4% (8)
State Government	—	4% (5)	—	2% (5)
Labor Unions	2% (1)	5% (7)	—	4% (8)
Church	—	3% (4)	3% (1)	2% (5)
Local Government	4% (2)	9% (12)	22% (8)	10% (22)
Federal Programs	—	2% (3)	—	1% (3)
Occupation	6% (3)	8% (10)	25% (9)	10% (22)
National Government	—	* (1)	3% (1)	* (2)
Civic and Fraternal Organizations	4% (2)	7% (9)	17% (6)	8% (17)
"All of My Experiences" (none singled out)	23% (11)	26% (34)	6% (2)	22% (47)
			N =	213

* N is greater than the sample because of multiple responses.

TABLE 8

The Impact of Pre-Election Experiences as Preparation for a Political Career

	CAP	Civil Rights	Neither
Provided exposure, motivation, training	24% (12)	22% (28)	14% (7)
Taught mechanics of government and political process	22% (11)	25% (32)	24% (12)
Taught knowledge of issues, community needs	18% (9)	29% (37)	14% (7)
Learned how to deal with people	12% (6)	8% (10)	4% (2)
Gained useful contacts	4% (2)	5% (7)	4% (2)
Other	20% (10)	2% (3)	12% (6)
Nothing learned or gained in any prior experience	2% (1)	9% (12)	29% (15)
N =	51	129	51

Equal proportions of all three groups stressed the knowledge they had gained of the mechanics of government, ranging from familiarity with local government personnel and procedures to budgetting to getting grants from the federal government. Some also stressed the understanding they had gained of interest group politics and believed they had learned how and where to bring pressure to bear on government at its most vulnerable points. Civil righters were somewhat more likely than the other two groups to mention that their involvement in pre-election activities (the most important of which were not civil rights organizations for all but 12 of the 118) was important for teaching them about the needs of their community. The residuals, many of whom we may recall had no pre-election involvement in any public program or agency or movement organization, were much more prone than either of the groups to suggest that they had entered political office wholly unprepared by anything in their previous experience. Except for the fact that the CAP'ers appear to have entered political life somewhat better prepared than others, however, the differences in the distribution or rank ordering of benefits among the three groups are not particularly striking.

Community action agencies also provided some limited resource support for politicians, although other organizations were probably more important in this regard. Voter registration and education projects sponsored by CAP organizers were widespread phenomena in the early years of the program, both of which helped ghetto politicians indirectly, and aspiring office-holders occasionally used mimeograph machines and mailing lists supplied by CAPs.

Community action agencies did not by and large offer political endorsements, however, nor did they seem to supply major campaign personnel to any great degree. Neighborhood and party organizations, in that order, most commonly supplied help for those who had any sort of organizational backing. Although CAPs did not for the most part supply campaign managers or other important campaign personnel, officials who had CAP experience nevertheless tended to draw on grass roots organizations for such people rather than on party organizations. Although two-thirds of the CAP'ers had worked actively for a political party prior to their initial election,[6] Table 9 suggests that those who drew on pre-existing organizations for important campaign workers eschewed the local party apparatus in favor of neighborhood, civil rights, and, in two instances, CAP groups. Although the numbers are small here, they offer a certain contrast with the other two categories of black officials.

6. DISCUSSION

It is clear that the Community Action Program of the War on Poverty has played a moderately significant role in the supply and training of black elected officials in state and local government. Black officials with CAP experience account for nearly a quarter of all blacks elected to state legislative lower houses, city hall, and city councils since 1964. These people appear to be slightly more politically ambitious than other black officials without such prior experience and more prone to rely on grass roots organizations for political help rather than on

TABLE 9

Organizational Source of Major Campaign Personnel
(Managers, Fund Raisers, Advisors)

	CAP	Civil Rights	Neither
Grass Roots Organizations	87% (13)	78% (43)	40% (4)
Model cities, CAP, neighborhood organizations, civil rights groups			
Party	13% (2)	22% (12)	60% (6)

NOTES: $X^2 = 57.70$.
Significant at the .001 level.

party organizations. Above all, they are heavily concentrated in urban areas. Moynihan, then, has essentially been proven correct in his prediction that CAP would help to form an urban black leadership echelon.

That urban rather than rural CAPs tended to produce black officials is not surprising: Christenson (1975, pp. 152-153) argues that rural CAPs in particular tended to be dominated by traditional local elites who controlled the representatives of the poor, carefully chose "acceptable" administrators, and used the program for purely economic and welfare ends rather than political mobilization. Such settings were thus less conducive to the emergence of independent, new black politicians than were the more turbulent urban CAPs.

That the urban leaders who had CAP experience were primarily attracted to the state legislatures rather than to city hall requires some slight modification of Moynihan's prediction. We can only speculate on the reasons for this special impetus to state political office. In part, one suspects that CAP activists gained special insights during their involvement in the poverty program into the limitations of city government as an instrument of social change, making city office a less attractive goal. In addition CAP agencies and city government in many places developed a deeply antagonistic relationship, particularly where militant poverty warriors sought to pressure city bureaucracies and officials to be more responsive to minority groups, and where CAP organizers sought to develop independent ghetto political movements. Under such circumstances city government may have been seen as a hostile environment in which to launch a political career.

State politics was a natural choice for other reasons, however. The CAP experience did not facilitate the making of a citywide reputation, except in very small places (recall that 6 out of the 10 CAP'er mayors were village mayors). In larger places the target clienteles of CAP agencies were distinct, ghettoized subpopulations, set apart by virtue of race and poverty. In most instances the poverty population constituted a minority of the city's inhabitants. If such populations generally provided too narrow a base on which to make a run for city hall, their residential concentration made them ideal constituencies for the support of legislative representatives.

Many aspirants to office were further encouraged to run for the state legislature rather than a city council seat by the fact that in most places the cities in which they had worked in CAPs have at-large council elections. Eleven of the cities (accounting for 12 representatives in our sample) have at-large elections, only three cities have straight ward elections, and the remainder have a mixture of both. To run in an at-large system is to confront the problem of expanding one's localized reputation and support base to encompass the city as a whole. Even in the ward cities of New York and Cleveland, it made sense to run for state office rather than the city council: In both places poverty area populations cross the boundaries of city council districts, so state legislative office encompasses a larger constituency.

It cannot be claimed that the Community Action Program was the most important institutional setting for the identification, training, and support of black officialdom, although no alternative institutions, including political parties[7] and the civil rights movement, seem signi-

ficantly more important. For many aspiring black politicians community action offered the right sort of organization at the right time. It was accessible to people without a carefully wrought set of credentials. Converging as it did with the rise in black voter registration after 1965, the development of the Community Action Program offered public visibility and access to the political process at public expense to people who would in most cases have been hard-pressed to amass on their own the resources necessary to achieve such benefits. CAP afforded a kind of controlled competition for visibility by excluding for the most past those aspirants to a political career who already had resources or popular followings. Thus, for example, CAPs offered a more congenial setting in which to rise than political party organizations, in which resource-rich individuals could command and monopolize the party's attention. By and large CAP agencies also offered a more structured environment for learning the job of politician than did the often less formal, more diffusely organized, more sporadic civil rights movement.

Whether CAP worked primarily to attract politically ambitious blacks who came to the program in order to use it as a political base or whether it inculcated those who were involved in it with political ambitions and provided them with political opportunities cannot be resolved by these data. To judge by volunteered responses to the open-ended question on benefits gained from pre-election involvements, people became involved in politics via both paths. In all probability any given community action agency drew into public service both activists and potential activists and either created in them or reinforced a taste for politics.

In light of these observations it becomes necessary to modify somewhat the generally gloomy assessments of the impact of community action. A number of studies have suggested that in the effort to resolve the conflicts between the two community action aims of ordinary (and politically safe) service delivery and institutional change and political mobilization (by nature abrasive and challenging to established authorities), most CAPs opted for the former.[8] At best it was argued these new service delivery mechanisms provided a few jobs in the ghetto, although even here most of the positions went to those who were already upwardly mobile.

But the nurturance of a black leadership cadre is an altogether different sort of achievement, transcending both the service delivery achievements of community action agencies and their modest attempts to underwrite a pressure group politics for the poor. Leadership development was not, as far as we can tell, a planned function of the Community Action Program. It evolved along a lengthy time dimension and thus could not have been evident at the point at which initial assessemtns of the Community Action Program were made. To the degree to which the program trained a significant portion of a generation of black political figures and provided them an entrée to political life, the impact of the program is likely to endure long after its modest service delivery innovations and community organizing efforts have been forgotten.

NOTES

[1]To my knowledge there are no reasonable estimates of the number of poor and/or minorities who were employed by CAPs in responsible positions or who served on boards. It is likely that the number ran into the tens of thousands.

[2]Of the 75 respondents not included in the analysis, 11 had died, 48 could not be located, 14 refused to be interviewed, and 2 provided unusable interviews. The 210 respondents who were interviewed successfully represented 32 states.

[3]These included Model Cities agencies, Headstart, neighborhood organizations, federally funded CAP agencies, city government, state government, civil rights organizations, manpower training centers, and Job Corps. In addition information about civic, fraternal, and other involvements was elicited.

[4]For a study on city councilmen, see Prewitt, 1970; for data on state legislators' involvements prior to state office, see Wahlke et al., 1962.

[5]Community action agency board elections were characterized by extremely low voting turnouts, however. Typically, less than 5% of the eligible population managed to come to the polls (Levitan, 1969, p. 114).

[6]Seventy-four percent of the civil righters had prior party experience as did 44% of the residuals.

[7]Cole's comparative study of white and black officials indicates that whites tended to have much longer histories of party activity than blacks did. The black politicians he studied entered politics from a base of civil rights activity, whereas whites were party and civic activists (1976, pp. 46, 54).

[8]This observation has been made by a number of scholars, including Rose, 1972 and Clark and Hopkins, 1969.

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